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AGREEMENT ANNOUNCED ON ARMY USE OF SMALL PORTION WICHITA MOUNTAINS REFUGE

General agreement between the Departments of the Interior and the Army concerning arrangements for the Army to use a small portion of the 59,000-acre Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma for training purposes was announced today by Ross L. Leffler, Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Fish and Wildlife.

Terms of the agreement, which has not yet been formally concluded, follow the plan proposed by the Department of the Interior during the several years that the Army has sought transfer or exclusive use of some 10,700 acres of the refuge.

The agreement reached this week would give the Army a new 10-year use permit covering only about one-third of that acreage. In effect, the new use permit is an extension of one which has been in force for many years.

Assistant Secretary Leffler said the agreement provides for the creation of a "buffer" zone for firing from inside the refuge toward impact areas within Fort Sill outside the refuge boundaries. This arrangement, he said, will provide for defense training needs and at the same time protect the public and the refuge from damage.

"It is our belief," Mr. Leffler said, "that the agreement reached by the two Departments will be supported by conservation interests throughout the country since the wildlife refuge will be fully protected and refuge management functions can be carried on properly. Our conferences were most amiable, and I found Army representatives very cooperative in arriving at this mutual understanding. Except for ironing out the operating details, I believe we can regard the Wichita Mountains Refuge dispute as a closed subject.

"The Department of the Interior consistently has taken the position that national defense training is essential, but we have recognized also our own responsibility for proper management of this valuable refuge area. We believe the terms of the present agreement will enable both Departments to fulfill their obligations to the public."

The five principal points of the agreement were stated as follows:

1. That a new, ten-year, use permit be offered to the Army for the establishment of a wedge-shaped buffer zone along the south boundary of the refuge, consisting of approximately one-third of the 10,700-acre tract, which would exclude the Boulder Camp, and the public-use facilities at Post Oak and Treasure Lakes. (The exact diagonal northern boundary line of said buffer zone to be defined clearly and accurately on a map prepared by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.)
2. That the Army agree to relocate, and rebuild at its expense outside of said buffer zone, facilities comparable to those in the Elm Springs and Pecan Springs Camps presently in that area, thereby removing all reason for public use of said buffer zone; and to relocate, and rebuild at its expense, the Indianoma Road so that it will run around and outside both the buffer zone and classified devices on the military lands in a way that it can be kept open to traffic at all times. (The site for the replacement of the Camps, and the right-of-way for the relocation of the road to be subject to the approval of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.)
3. That the Army agree to keep State Highway No. 49 into the Refuge open at all times when there is no danger from firing, and to suspend firing, if necessary, to permit passage of school buses.
4. That the Army agree to deliver to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service a new copy of the firing schedule for the impact area south of the Refuge whenever there is a change in the plans, so that the personnel of the Service may enter the buffer zone in safety for the proper discharge of their duties and responsibilities in refuge management.
5. That the Army agree that said buffer zone shall not be used as an impact area; that it will patrol the area at regular intervals for the recovering of duds, and for the prevention of fires that may occur as the result of firing on the adjacent range to the south; and will assist in preventing hunting on the refuge lands by either military or civilian personnel.

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